

Box 26 Folder 4

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Richard S. MacNeish

C16A

Box 42 NO DDL







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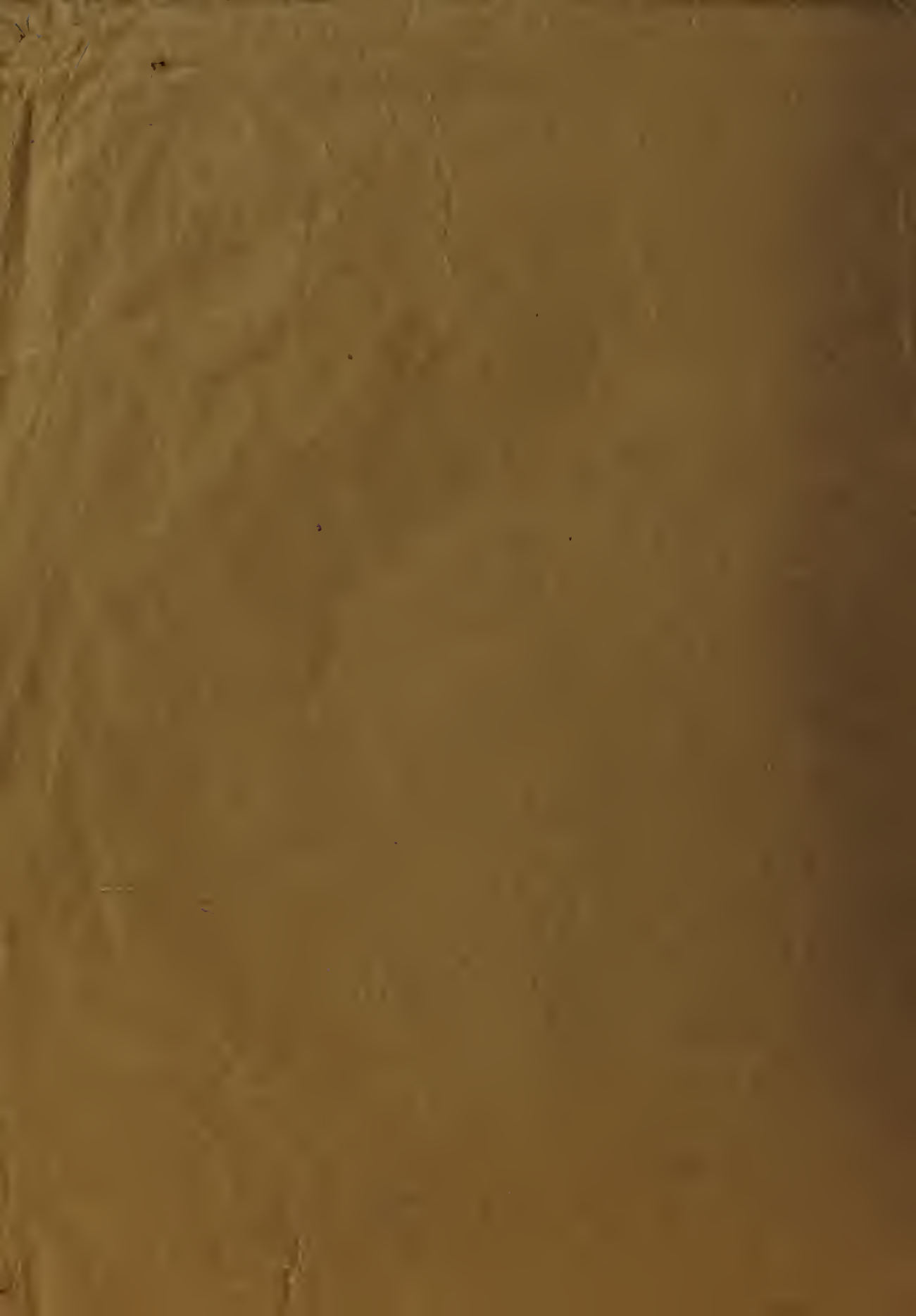
Teeth

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JAW BONE

SKULL











## Relations Between Middle America and the Southeast

It appears very likely that the archaeological cultures of the southeastern United States had some contact with and at various times received a stimuli from the advanced cultures of Middle America. We do not know when and how this occurred because we have only very meager information from certain critical areas, information which at the most serves to outline the problem and suggest lines of further research rather than to permit of any general conclusions.

It seems to me that the most likely means or route of contact between the cultures of Middle America and the Southeast is the land route up through the coastal area of Tamaulipas, Texas, and Louisiana. There are several basic arguments for considering this the most likely route of contact. In the first place it is the shortest land route between centers of the Middle American and Southeastern cultures. There is the possibility that contact was made by water across the Gulf of Mexico but that alternative is difficult of proof, and cannot be seriously considered until we have completely examines the possibility of overland contact. Secondly, there is the conclusion of some southeastern specialists that the region around the mouth of the Mississippi River is the point of origin for certain basic traits in the eastern United States, traits which might very well have come from Middle America. In the third place there are certain similarities between types of objects from the Southeast and from the Huasteca, the Middle American culture area which is closest geographically to the Southeastern area.





There are, it is true, certain objections to postulating contacts or the diffusion of culture or peoples up this coastal route. From Tampico to the Mississippi River is a distance of about 800 miles, much of it arid, and, at the time of the conquest, at least, occupied by relatively uncultured nomadic peoples. Furthermore, no archaeological traces of the passage of the more advanced peoples on this route have been found. These objections can only be met by a thorough search of the entire coastal area.

The Huasteca is centered about the lower valley of the Panuco River, comprising parts of the states of Tamaulipas, Vera Cruz, San Luis Potosi, and Hidalgo. Knowledge of the archaeology of this area is essential to problems of southeastern relationships, because it is through it that Middle American cultural influences most likely passed to reach the Southeast. Most speculations about the Huasteca as a place of origin for movements with the Southeast have been extremely vague because we have had no idea of what transpired in that area. This will in part be remedied by my own recent work in the Huasteca, of which I shall give a brief resume. I will not enter into many of the details of that work, as the complete report will be published very soon, but I shall outline the principal events in the region as I see them before attempting any general speculations of Southeastern relationships.

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My work was limited to the region of Tampico and Panuco and what I have found does not necessarily apply to the Huasteca as a whole. A deep stratigraphic excavation at Panuco where rubbish deposits were found to a depth of 6.5 meters is the key to the ceramic sequence in the area and excavations at other sites served to fill in the cultural content of the different periods.

Six sequent periods have been defined and are numbered from I to VI, beginning at the bottom.

Periods I and II are characterized by monochrome pottery and are thought to correlate in time with the Archaic cultures in Central Mexico and with the Mamon-Chicanel phases in the Lowland Maya area. Affiliations are with the lowland Maya area and with Monte Alban - not with the Valley of Mexico.

Periods III and IV can be correlated roughly in time with the Teotihuacan Period. The principal connections seem to be also with the Valley of Mexico and all influence or connection with the Maya area was completely cut off.

The exterior affiliations of Period V are most clear. It is obviously to be correlated with the Aztec II-Mazapan horizon of Central Mexico and East Central Mexico.

Period VI persisted undoubtedly until the time of the Spanish conquest. Characteristic of this period is the black-on-white pottery which has often been called "Huasteca ware". Examples of this and other types of the same period have been found in the region of Brownsville, Texas and described by Mason.

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It is apparent therefore that the Huasteca was occupied continually from the earliest times to the conquest. The cultures in the area received repeated waves of influence from the south but also maintained a certain continuity in their cultural patterns and certain unique characteristics. Just how the cultures in the area compared in degree of development with those of Central Mexico is not clear as yet in the small amount of material available. They were in contact with the south, however, and although they were probably to a certain extent peripheral and backward - not excessively so. What is important in connection with our subject of discussion here is that the cultural(?) of the Huasteca were sufficiently well developed to have served as the origin for Middle American influences which may have emanated into the Southeast. The full significance of the sequence in regard to northern relationships cannot of course be determined until we have a more complete knowledge of the content of the cultures of the area.

With this as a background we will now consider the possibilities of relationship with the Southeast.

At a site known as Tancol, situated just to the north of Tampico we found a ceramic complex which is different from anything in the general sequence for the area and which I am calling the Tancol Complex. Without doubt it belongs to Period II. The characteristic decoration is a broad groove type of incision which occurs on the exteriors of bowls, etc. (slides).

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In the type of incision and in certain design motives this suggests Southeastern pottery but does not specifically resemble any one southeastern type. The southeasternists who have examined it claim to see elements of design which are found from the earliest to the latest periods in Southeastern sequence. It is a pottery type which seems to be out of line with Middle American ceramics in general, but it bears some resemblance to pottery of Periods I and II at Monte Alban. In the Huasteca it would seem to be datable at about 500 or 600 A.D.

We must learn more of the Tancol Complex before its real significance in relation to the Southeast can be seen. It is, however, the first good possibility of a direct ceramic connection between Middle America and the Southeast at an early period. It points up the possibility that we will perhaps be able to find in the Huasteca evidence of the origin of the first influences which were received in the Southeast. Pottery comparable to that of the Tancol Complex is estimated to have appeared in the Southeast at about 900 A.D., somewhat later than the probable date of the Tancol Complex. It is possible that either date is wrong, although that of the Tancol Complex is probably more accurate. The estimated dates for the Southeast may be too late or it is possible that there was a lag of hundreds of years in the diffusion of traits from the Huasteca to the Mississippi Valley.





It is thought that agriculture and burial mounds appeared in Louisiana at about the same time as incised pottery. These could just as well have come from the Huasteca also. Undoubtedly the economy of Periods I and II in the Huasteca was basically agricultural and techniques and food plants could have been obtained there.

In the eastern United States the trait of burying the dead in a conical mound is thought to have appeared first in the Lower Mississippi region and a Middle American origin for the trait has been suggested. This is possible but we haven't as yet sufficient data from the earlier periods in Middle America to know if this could be correct. The only thing from early periods in Middle America which is comparable to burial within a mound is the tomb of basalt columns which was found last year by Dr. Stirling at La Venta. Nothing comparable to this has been found in the Huasteca - but then, we know practically nothing of the culture of the earlier periods in this area.

This possibility of connections between the Middle American and Southeastern cultures during the earlier periods will be difficult to work out in detail. It is not known how far to the north the earlier cultures of the Huasteca extended and nothing of significance in this respect has been reported from the Texas Coast. Extensive exploration in the intervening coastal region will be necessary to find traces on this early connection. Supposedly a diffusion northward of a culture bearing these basic traits would have taken place through a more gradual movement and would have required considerable time. The excavations in the Huasteca show that there were advanced cultures in that area at an early time which would serve as an adequate point of departure.





It is possible that a band of travelers could have started from anywhere within the Middle American area and reached the southeast, but their most obvious point of departure would have been the Huasteca and there is some indication that that was their point of origin.

The round carved shell pendants of the southeast are particularly important in regard to Middle American relationships. They are decorated with motives which are in many ways suggestive of Middle American Art forms, but a fact of significance is that shell ornaments of the same shape and general technique are found in Middle America principally if not only in the Huasteca. There are several rather suggestive similarities in the gorgets from the two areas as in for instance the cross design in several from Mississippi and Missouri and two from Panuco. There is another rather striking similarity between a skull incised on a vessel from Moundville, Alabama and one of the circular gorgets from the Huasteca. Note that the scalloped line on the skull, which has no counterpart in nature, is very similar in the two cases.

The complete motive in which the Moundville shell occurs consists of a series of objects including a skull, a heart, and a hand - and in other examples a skull and a hand or a skull, heart band, and bone. Now this combination of elements is so precisely similar to what occurs in the frescoes at Tizatlan, Puebla, and on some vessels of Cholula Polychrome that there can be no possibility of anything but a common origin. This similarity was first shown by Spinden.





These precise similarities between Middle American and Southeastern art motives are the most conclusive evidence of connection available, but there are also a great many less precise similarities which seem to substantiate them. There are the warrior figures on shell gorgets and copper plaques, plumed serpents, spiders, etc. which are out of line with southeastern culture in general and which are highly suggestive of Middle American art forms.

These are only several suggestions of links with the Huasteca in this category of art forms, but it is clear that any of them could have come from the Huasteca. In Period V at least in the Huasteca there were close links with Central Mexico and the small amount of material we have suggests that there were people there who were cognizant of Central Mexican symbolism and art forms. There is some evidence that the shell gorgets described by Beyer are largely of Period V date.

Appearing in the lower Mississippi area at about the same time as the art forms we have been discussing are the so called Temple Mounds. These are flat topped structures, often with stairways and arranged around plazas much in the manner of such buildings at Middle American sites. Such would seem definitely to have been copied from Middle American prototypes. They do not however point to any one area in Middle America, but I might again suggest the Huasteca.



At Tampico we cleared one mound which proved to contain a large number of superimposed round conical structures which were made solely of earth and covered with a thin layer of plaster. At other sites we found evidence of buildings covered solely with baked clay or with thin layers of asphalt. A number of these appeared to be round but apparently rectangular structures also occur. Of interest here however is the fact that they are simple substructures in which stone was not used and might conceivably be prototypes of the entirely earthen and sometimes clay covered structures of the southeast. In the Tampico-Panuco area they were being built from the early periods undoubtedly up to the time of the conquest.

Vaillant has studied the similarities in form of pottery vessels in the southeast and Middle America and his publication contains in illustrated form a good resume of this subject. Since the publication of that paper, however, enough has been learned of the cultural sequences in the Southeast to show that his general conclusion is probably incorrect, as has been demonstrated by Phillips in his paper in The Maya and Their Neighbors. Phillips shows that all of the pottery from the Southeast which shows outstanding resemblance to Middle American forms can not be dated earlier than about 1400 A.D. Vaillant's conclusion, therefore that there was an older diffusion northward of Q. Complex traits is hardly tenable.





It seems likely therefore that the Middle American resemblances in the pottery of the Southeast must be linked with the other traits we have mentioned above as having been imported into the Southeast at a relatively late time. Some of these pottery forms could have come out of the Huasteca in the last two periods but it is not certain that all of them could. Complete analysis must await further study.

In this brief summary of the important problems concerned with the relationships of the Middle American and Southeastern cultures I have more or less assumed that contacts did occur and have tried to show that the cultures of the Huasteca probably played an important role in such connections.







